No. 38

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

When Alice finally arrived in her boudoir, she stood for a long time staring into space. There was a smoldering fire in her eyes. R. of M. G., No. 38.

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CAPTAIN LE MANS was holding himself in check only with an effort. The time was not yet ripe for him to declare himself. So when Ruth gently disengaged herself and moved a few steps away, he did not follow her. He was far too shrewd a man to make a blunder now.

With his head bowed, he waited for her to make the next move and to speak.

Ruth was staring at the lighted windows, then her glance wandered back to the flowers behind which the eavesdropper had been hiding.

"This is not a safe place for us, captain," she said evenly. "We better get away from her. Would you mind taking a stroll with me?"

Le Mans took a step toward her.

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," he answered, bending over her.

They walked away, arm in arm, she leading the way. They crossed the spacious lawn and headed in the direction of the summer pavillion.

But they did not enter the structure. Ruth selected an open spot that no one could approach without being seen.

After a lengthy space of silence, she breathed a deep sigh.

"Oh, I am sick of it all," she said, dangerously close to tears again. "I wish I had never come to this horrible place."

Captain Le Mans touched her shoulder.

"I can hardly blame you for feeling that way, my dear Mrs. Bingham," he replied. "But now that you are here, don't give up the fight. You must fight them to the finish. You are still Allan Bingham's wife, and they must respect you as such."

Ruth uttered a short, cynical laugh.

"Allan Bingham's wife!" she scoffed. "So far as I am concerned, Allan Bingham has ceased to exist. He is not a man. He is the worst kind of a cad to enter into a conspiracy with his mother against me."

Fierce determination seized her as she added:

"But I will do as you suggest, Captain Le Mans. I will stay and fight them with every weapon at my command.

"I'll resort to the same despicable method the are using against me.. My trickery and stealth shall match theirs. And I will show them that I am no novice at playing that game."

When she finished speaking she leaned slightly toward Captain Le Mans, as if she expected to hear a word or two of encouragement from him.

It came.

"The English are a despicable race," he said in a low, yet very distinct voice. "Trickery and stealth have always been their favorite weapons. They ought to be wiped off the face of the earth."

As he uttered these words he watched the young Mrs. Bingham closely.

"I am not concerned about the entire English race," she responded. "But I would like to give these Binghams something to remember me by. I can never forget or forgive their horrible treatment of me. I must get even somehow."

Le Mans regarded her for a moment.

"The way is open for you to bring them into disrepute with the English government," he whispered as he glanced furtively about. Of course all depends on whether you have the courage and the daring. I wonder if you have, Mrs. Bingham."

The latter tossed her head.

"I have the courage and I dare almost anything,"

she cried with an eagerness that both surprised and pleased him not a little.

He grinned.

"I — I just wonder if you have," he repeated.

"Put me to a test!" Ruth said.

"I will," came back quickly. "Now listen!" He moved closer to her. "Your husband was formerly a lieutenant in the English navy. He took the highest degree in chemistry at Oxford, and he discovered a certain explosive, which, if used in torpedoes, would destroy the most powerful dreadnaught in the English navy. I know this to be absolutely true."

The Frenchman had paused to watch the effect of his words.

Presently he continued with a satisfied smile:

"The formula for making this high explosive, is in Allan Bingham's possession. Get a hold of it and then turn it over to me. With that in my hands, I can crush him and put a stigma on the name of every Bingham that nothing can efface."

Ruth gave a shudder.

The thought that Captain Le Mans was a French spy had never entered her mind. And now she recalled what Allan Bingham had said about him. But that did not make any impression now.

The one thought dominating her at this particular moment was that of revenge..

And when she told Captain Le Mans that she dared anything, she meant every word of it from the bottom of her embittered soul.

Captain Le Mans was waiting patiently to hear Ruth avow her willingness to do the part he had assigned to her.. When she remained in silent thoughtfulness for a considerable length of time, he began to wonder if he had misjudged this American woman.

"You need have no fear of the consequences, my dear Mrs. Bingham," he said smoothly. "No matter what happens, I will assume the consequent responsibilities. I hope you are not afraid."

"Afraid?" She laughed in his face. "I am not the least bit afraid. You don't know me yet, Captain Le Mans. I'll not stop at anything to get even with these Binghams."

Poor, deluded Ruth!

If she could only have read the future she would never have entered into a compact of that nature with a man like Le Mans.

Chapter 124

THE LAST STEP

PHILIP GORDON, after his trip to the Talbot Estate, returned home in a dejected state of mind. He stood face to face with a problem he was unable to solve. He tried to argue himself into the belief that this mysterious young woman, the sole survivor of that horrible automobile wreck, could not have been his sister Ruth.

Surely, she had not sunk to the degradation of consorting with the low element usually found in roadhouses of questionable repute..

In spite of her love for pleasure and occasional periods of recklessness, he believed her incapable of participating in wild automobile rides at all hours of the night.

So he finally concluded to play the game of watchful waiting.

If Ruth was hiding somewhere in the neighborhood of Oak Manor, he figured that , sooner or later, she would appeal to him for help.

But several days passed and nothing was heard of the young woman who had absented herself in such a mysterious manner from the home of Victor Talbot. She had disappeared without leaving a trace.

Meanwhile the automobile wreck, which had resulted so disastrously with the loss of four lives, continued to be the main topic of conversation in the entire neighborhood.

One evening as Gordon took his customary stroll through the grounds, he saw his wife and Nora Evans

seated on a bench with their heads together.

That they were discussing something of keen interest to them both, was evidenced by their faces and occasional gesticulations.

"I wonder what they are talking about," Phil muttered as he passed the two women at a safe distance. "I wish I could induce Alice to discharge that Evans girl. She is crooked if ever a female was."

Gordon was perfectly correct in voicing his suspicions. Nora Evans was not only crooked, but she had a prison record.

But at that, she had never stooped to some of the despicable trickery practiced by his own wife under his very nose.

Alice, although successfully masquerading under the guise of a respectable society woman, was perhaps the worst criminal at heart.

She had not a single redeeming feature about her, except her alluring, tigerish sort of beauty. She could be pleasant if she chose—and some men thought her irresistible, but underneath her ready smiles lurked danger.

As it happened Phil was not the only one who usually took a stroll through the grounds before retiring. Marie Desmond, the governess, also was in the habit of doing this.

But Marie took precious good care that she did not meet Phil alone during these walks. In fact she dreaded nothing more than such a meeting with the man she once called her husband.

She had more than an inkling that he had fallen in love with her as Marie Desmond, and for that reason she held herself aloof.

Not that she did not love Phil. She loved him with every ounce of her physical and mental strength. That love, fanned by pity, had grown to a mad longing that

could not be satisfied.

Ah, how many times she had struggled against the insistent cry of her love-hungry soul!

But she dared not reveal that she was his first wife, for if she did, Phil would stand before the world exposed as a bigamist.

No, she must wait until kind providence saw fit to alleviate her suffering.

When Marie spied Phil making for the rustic bridge which spanned the left arm of the small lake, she quickly hid behind a clump of tall shrubbery.

She saw him plainly, as he stood in the moonlight, both hands pressed against his temples.

He was suffering the same as she, and she could not comfort him. Remorse tortured him unceasingly, and he was cursed with an unfaithful wife. And in addition to this had come the worry about his only sister.

Somehow Marie felt glad when he slowly started back toward the house. She could not have stood this silent watching much longer without breaking down and calling his name.

She followed him a few minutes later, but by a different path. Suddenly she stopped.

A voice which she instantly recognized as that of Nora Evans came to her clear and distinct. Marie's first impulse was to beat a hasty retreat, but something seemed to hold her in check.

"There is nothing for you to worry about now, Mrs. Gordon," Nora was saying. "What if Dr. Stanford was killed?"

"But I am worried," a second voice which Marie knew to be that of Phil's second wife, replied. "We have absolutely no assurance that he put her out of the way and——"

"Just rest easy on that score," the Evans girl

broke in with an ugly laugh. "I know something you don't." Here she resorted to whispering which she kept up for quite a while. "So you see," she finished in a tone loud enough to be heard, "I am always on the alert. When Victor Talbot and your husband drove away that night, James and I beat them to it."

Marie leaned closer. What did it mean? Who was the person these two were talking about? She had gleaned the fact that it must be a woman.

Then came an announcement from Mrs. Gordon that shocked Marie as she had perhaps never been shocked before. It convinced her how little some men could be trusted to keep their word.

"I have an appointment with Harold Wayne tonight at ten," Alice confessed to Nora. "I am not going into the house, but I want you to keep me posted when my husband goes to bed. You'll do that, won't you?"

"But aren't you afraid?" Nora inquired. "What if——"

"No, I am not afraid," the mistress of the house broke in with some vehemence. "And what is more, I don't care. I am sick and tired of being buried out here. If my husband won't take me back to the city to live, someone else will."

"Ah, I see," the other grinned. "And that someone else is Harold Wayne."

"But I haven't said that," came back quickly. "I have asked Harold to meet me in the pavillion at ten. Don't be surprised, however, if some fine morning you find me missing."

Marie did not wait to hear any more. As she stole quietly back to the house she was in a quandary.

She had saved Alice once, but she had no intention of doing it again. So far as Harold Wayne was concerned she felt only contempt.

As she passed through the hall she heard Phil talking to his father-in-law in the library. Involuntarily she paused.

"My dear boy," old John Procter exclaimed in reply to something Phil had just said, "I feel that this unfortunate young woman was my Betty. Why in the world didn't you tell me about that sooner. It couldn't have been your sister, for Ruth sailed for Paris. I suppose you knew that."

"No, I didn't," the younger man retorted, surprised. "But, after all," he added in a pained voice, "it does not make a great deal of difference to me where she is. She has made her own bed, now let her sleep in it."

Once more Marie was playing the eavesdropper, but not for long this time. Like a shadow she glided through the hall and up the stairs to her room.

Her thoughts were no longer of Alice and the new treason the latter was about to commit.

Her heart went out in tender sympathy to the heartbroken father down in the library. Piece by piece she patched what information she had together.

She called to mind the apparition in the park on a certain night not so long ago.

She remembered the pleading voice of the young woman whom Nora Evans had so roughly driven back to the tower.

This unfortunate young woman could have been no other than Betty, old John Procter's missing daughter and now the wife of Bob Harding.

Marie instantly saw the reason why Alice had imprisoned her sister in the tower. Alice wanted to be the sole heir of her father's fortune.

Another thing that became clear to her now, was that Nora Evans played an important part in the matter. Now Marie also understoood why Alice had fought so

hard to retain the Evans girl in her employ.

"Oh, I wish I could do something to unravel this mystery," she murmured as she paced back and forth. "But I have no facts."

Marie finally concluded to keep a close watch upon Nora Evans. Betty was still being held a prisoner somewhere. But she must be liberated before it was too late, if such a thing was humanly possible.

With this thought firmly fixed in her mind, Marie undressed and sought rest in sleep.

In the library Phil Gordon and his father-in-law were just finishing their discussion. The old gentleman seemed downcast and sad.

While he had no proof, he insisted that Betty was being kept away from him and her young husband by some person seeking to profit thereby.

For a time he had been inclined to believe that kidnapers were responsible.

But he had never received a demand for money, which exploded the kidnapping theory. There were moments when he suspected Alice, but the latter had always denied being responsible in the most vehement manner.

"By the way, Phil," he said in a guarded tone as he was about to go upstairs, "if I were you I'd keep an eye on Harold Wayne."

"Why, dad?" surprised.

"I heard Alice talking to him over the telephone to-day," came back

Gordon shook his head.

"I don't think there is anything to worry about," he declared. "Wayne has given me his word that he would cut out that sort of thing. Lately he has been behaving very well."

John Procter took a few steps in the direction of the stairway, then returned. There was obviously some-

thing on his mind that had been left unsaid.

"Wayne may be behaving, but I doubt whether Alice is," he remarked, a pained look coming into his eyes. "I know it is a terrible thing to say about one's own daughter. But why should she be asking him to meet him in the pavillion at ten o'clock to-night?"

A quick gasp escaped Phil's lips.

"Are you sure your ears did not deceive you, dad?" he demanded hoarsely.

"I am an old man," the other smiled apologetically, "but I am still in full possession of my senses. Do you think for a moment I would say such a thing if I were not absolutely sure?"

Gordon patted his father-in-law on the shoulder.

"Alright, dad," he said, his voice scarcely above a whisper. "Thanks for the information. Good night."

While John Procter dragged his feet wearily up the stairs, Phil returned to the library. A quick glance at the clock on the mantle told him that it was ten minutes of ten.

From a drawer in his writing table he took a gun and examined it.

Then with a motion of disgust he threw the weapon back and grumbled some incoherent words to himself. Slowly the clock ticked on. The next five minutes seemed like so many hours.

Gordon was apparently still debating whether to go to the pavilion or not. Then, suddenly, he ran to the door, jerked it open and left the house.

But another figure had preceeded him. Harold Wayne, coming from another direction was already in the pavillion, and Alice had thrown herself into his arms.

"Oh, I knew you would not fail me!" she cried. "I can not stand this life any longer, Harold. For God's sake, take me away from here."

He disengaged himself from the woman's embrace and retreated a step.

"Is that why you asked me to meet you here tonight?" he inquired. "You ought to know how utterly impossible that is, Alice. I gave your husband my word of honor that I would never again be seen with you alone."

"You are keeping your word." Alice replied with a low laugh. "No one knows you came to meet me."

"But I owe your husband——" he began.

"My husband!" the woman broke in with a sneer. "He is nothing to me and never was. You should worry about him. Lately he sickens me. I'll tell you, Harold if you don't take me away, I'll do something desperate."

Wayne remained unmoved by her plea. His conscience was still his master and he strove to escape the woman's witchery.

Alice understood fully why he hesitated, and she threw herself again in his arms and pressed her hot lips to his.

"Harold — Harold!" she wailed. "Can't you see how passionately I love you? There was a time when you professed to love me. Oh, how bitterly I am disappointed in you!"

Alice broke into a fit of violent weeping. Wayne felt her full bosom pressed against his, and the racing of her heartbeats.

"Listen, Alice," he said, desperate, "I can't wrong your husband the second time. If you can't live with him, get a divorce and I'll make you my wife before all the world."

"But I don't want a divorce!" Alice gasped angrily. "Do you think I'd give him a chance to marry that Desmond woman? Why, he is simply crazy about her. I hate her and I hate him. No, they shall never be-

long to each other so long as I can prevent it."

Once more Alice pressed her lips to those of Harold Wayne. She noticed how a shiver ran over his frame. He was weakening.

"Good God, girl," he pleaded. "Don't make it so hard for me to refuse."

"You can't refuse!" the woman panted. "I won't let you. I want you now and I want you always. Take me while you have the chance, Harold. I'll be yours until I draw my last breath."

"Alice—Alice!" he gasped, his resistance gone. "I love you."

It was then that they became aware that they were not alone. Harold Wayne saw the intruder first, but did not recognize him in the semi-darkness. With a quick whispered word he directed the woman's attention.

One glance at the ominously quiet figure standing there told her that it was her husband. She had been caught and she knew it.

"Phil!" she cried, swiftly disengaging herself from her lover's arms. "Phil!"

Gordon stood as if paralyzed. Then suddenly he took one step forward.

Chapter 125

HOPELESS DISGRACE

SINCE the ending of the world war the relations between France and England had become somewhat strained owing to a difference of opinion with regard to the Versailles treaty. France made the mistake of deliberately creating the impression among the other European nations that she had replaced Germany as a world power.

In some respects her attitude was arrogant, which aroused unfavorable comment in the English as well as the American newspapers.

It was generally conceded that France now possessed the greatest army. And there was considerable suspicion that she hoped to bring her naval strength to match that of England.

First it was Germany who resented the British domination of the sea.

Between these two countries a bitter fight for supremacy in the world of commerce and naval construction had always existed. Then the war came, and Germany ceased to exist as a contender.

But it seemed that France had determined to follow Germany's footsteps.

When England boasted of a new dreadnaught of great dimensions, armed with fifteen inch guns, French naval constructors came right back with the declaration that within a few months a new French dreadnaught would be launched of even greater dimensions and armed with sixteen inch guns.

Both governments, anxious to keep well informed,

inaugurated a spy system. English naval officers, disguised as ordinary travelers, thronged Paris.

Various methods were employed to learn secrets known only to the highest officials on the French naval construction board.

The French government, aware of this, retaliated by sending some of her most intelligent sons to Oxford to be educated, from Oxford they graduated into the diplomatic service and became naval attaches in London.

Then, quite unexpectedly, the British board of naval strategy was called into a special session.

For some time there had prevailed an undercurrent of restlessness and apprehension among the men comprising the board of naval strategy, whose most important duty it was to safeguard the secrets of the greateset navy of the world and further its progress.

And this board did not meet without a reason. Trouble was brewing across the channel.

Something had happened to throw them into a state of unprecedented excitement.

A French publication devoted to the interest of the French naval policy contained an article which hinteed broadly at the purchase of a formula for a high explosive, which, if applied properly, would render every sea power harmless in case of another war.

Of course, England was credited with having the most formidable fleet. All the world knew that. And there was a sentence or two in the article which seemed to hint directly at England.

And while no names were mentioned in this publication, the article stated that the formula had been bought from a former naval officer in the largest navy of the world.

Another sentence contained a veiled threat. This threat was aimed at the nation which for centuries had

dominated the sea.

Quite naturally the British Lion was aroused. He was not to be threatened with impunity. He hotly resented the implication that one of his own officers should have sold this formula to a foreign government. Such a thing could not have happened.

Then in another column of this same publication was the announcement that Captain Le Mans, for years a naval attache in London, had been recalled.

But the excitement prevailing in Downing Street was nothing compared with the consternation rampant at Bingham Manor.

Allan Bingham's American wife had mysteriously disappeared.

With her disappearance came the discovery that a package of important papers which belonged to her husband, was missing.

No greater calamity could have befallen Bingham Manor.

The old Earl of Bingham, his wife and son were closeted in the library behind locked doors. They had been discussing the affair in awed voices.

Allan Bingham was pacing the floor in a most restless manner.

His father sat, head bowed, pale and trembling in a chair, with his wife facing him. He flatly refused to believe that the very important papers had been deliberately stolen.

He stubbornly clung to the belief that they had been misplaced.

"Are you absolutely sure that they can not be found anywhere in the house?" he asked his son for the second time.

The former lieutenant of the English navy paused in his walk.

"There is not the least doubt about it in my mind father," he retorted gloomily.

"And are you of the opinion that they were stolen, my boy?"

"They must have been," came back quickly. "I have searched every nook and corner in my desk and in my room. I even went through all the trunks in the attic. I can't find them anywhere."

"Do you —— do you suspect your wife?" the old Earl queried somewhat timidly.

Allan did not reply at once.

"I do," his mother spoke up.

"Whom do you suspect?" the former naval officer inquired, paling.

"Your American wife."

"But why do you suspect her mother? Because she saw fit to leave this house so unceremoniously? I could hardly blame Ruth for that. God knows we made it unpleasant enough for her."

Lady Bingham shook her head.

"I suspect her because of her intimacy with Captain Le Mans. She —— "

"Good God, mother, you don't mean to say that my wife stole those papers and turned them over to Le Mans in a spirit of revenge?" the former lieutenant of the British navy exclaimed, white to his lips. "No, I will not believe anything so base of her."

"Well, I don't mean that exactly," the mother said slowly.

"Then what do you mean, mother?"

Lady Bingham hesitated a moment.

"I mean," she said, "that Captain Le Mans persuaded her to steal the papers, that she entered into a sort of an conspiracy with him. No doubt he paid her handsomely, for these American women are mercenary

as a rule.

"Now don't shake your head, Allan. I know this to be true from experience. American women are nearly all mercenary. And I am firmly of the belief that your wife and Captain Le Mans left London together."

Allan Bingham drew himself up and an angry flash came into his eyes.

"If that is the case —— if Ruth ran off with the Frenchman, you are to blame, mother!" he cried. "You alone!"

"I?" Lady Bingham essayed to laugh, but made a failure of it.

"Yes, you!" Allan repeated.

"And why, son?"

Young Bingham drew himself up.

"I will tell you, and please do not interrupt me," he said as he confronted his mother, his square jaw working visibly: "You always taught me to be a man of honor. When I made Ruth my wife, I did so because my honor demanded it.

"And I am sure this horrible thing would never have happened, had you treated her like a daughter." He raised a hand as his mother seemed about to interrupt him. "No, don't stop me. I want you to hear me to the end.

"Ruth comes from one of the best and wealthiest families in America. She was high-spirited and unusually proud. She came here under my protection and I wanted all of my friends and relatives to respect her as the future Lady Bingham.

"What happened? You treated her worse than a servant. You snubbed her unmercifully. You humiliated her in the presence of others when ever an opportunity presented itself.

"Finally you entered into a low intrigue to dis-

credit her to the extent of getting sufficient grounds for a divorce.

'I was cad enough to permit you to do that, because you gave me no peace. And through your constant urging and never-ending coercion, I permitted you to go through with this unspeakable thing.

"When you selected Captain Le Mans as the man to compromise her, I warned you. I told you what a dangerous man he was, and that he was suspected of being a French spy.

"The fact that he was under supicion should have been enough. But you ignored my warning. I never trusted Le Mans. He always reminded me of a leopard with his purring laugh and staight hair.

"You threw Ruth into his company. You insisted upon giving a ball while I was away. In your anxiety to force matters you made yourself ridiculous.

"I positively believe that Ruth saw through your ruse. No doubt her resentment toward all of us grew until it became hatred. And ready to go to almost any extreme to be revenged for the abominable treatment we accorded her, she became a most willing tool in Captain Le Mans' hands.

"There is not the least question in my mind as to what transpired. Captain Le Mans was no fool. He is handsome enough to turn almost any woman's head. You know that very well.

"Le Mans persuaded Ruth to steal the papers for him. Whether she really fell in love with him, I do not know or care now, but she eloped with him just the same. They are safely in Paris where no one can touch either of them.

"But that is not the worst of it. No one knew of my formula for the high explosive except the English government and myself.

"I had given my word of honor that no other nation should purchase it, because I considered it my duty to let my own country use it in case of war.

"Now comes that damned French paper and insinuates that French agents bought the formula from me. Do you realize the frightful position this places me in? It is horrible.

"I shall be regarded with suspicion for the rest of my life. God only knows where it will lead. You and father will be severely criticized because you permitted Captain Le Mans to have the freedom of the house. No greater mistake could have been made..

"I would gladly give twenty years of my life to undo that mistake, and both of you would give every penny you own to be able to undo it before we hear the end of this thing."

A piteous, helpless look swept young Bingham's face as he ceased speaking.

He threw out a hand passionatey.

"Do you know, mother," he said solemnly, "what my brother officers will expect of me? Can you have the least idea?"

Lady Bingham stared at her son aghast.

"What?" she quavered.

"You know how a traitor to his country is punished as a rule," he almost sobbed. "But in my case it will be different. The method of my punishment will be suggested to me by the sending of a loaded revolver. I shall have to be my own executioner."

The mother sprang up with a low cry of anguish.

"Allan—my boy, not that!" she wailed. "Oh, not that."

"A man shorn of his honor is better dead," the former naval officer said hopelessly.

"They can not dishonor you," Lady Bingham

cried, desperate. "You are not guilty of treason. I know you are not. Your father knows, and there are many others who will never believe it. Oh, it was all a terrible mistake I would give anything I possess to be able to rectify it."

The young man shook his head.

"I am afraid it is too late, mother. In this case you won't be able to help your boy. I'll have to face it alone."

With a despairing cry she threw herself into her son's arms and began to weep hysterically.

"My boy—my boy," she sobbed as she bowed her head, quivering.

Allan was conscious that his mother was on her knees. He barely heard her broken words of repentance and shame for the contemptible role she had been playing.

He lifted her very tenderly.

"Mother—mother," he said, "It's alright. You meant it for the best."

The old Earl of Bingham was sniffing. He rose and walked over to where his wife and son stood in close embrace.

"Gad, it can't be as bad as all that," he said huskily. "I'll go with you to the board of naval strategy and explain the entire matter. There has never been a single drop of disloyal blood in a Bingham. My father gave his life during the Irish rebellion.

"I served thirty years in South Africa as colonel of the famous Lancashire regiment. I sacrificed the best part of my life for the interest of the kingdom.

"And they will listen to me when I explain this unfortunate matter. Come, Allan, the board meets today. We'll make a clean breast of it all. They must give us a hearing, my boy. They must."

"Yes—yes," the mother cried eagerly. "Go and tell them everything. I'll take all the blame."

Allan Bingham straightened himself up and gazed at his mother, his eyes brimming with tears.

"Your name shall not be mentioned, dear heart," he said very tenderly. "No matter what the outcome will be, I'll assume the responsibility. I will never have it said of me that I hid behind a petticoat."

The young man ran from the room, followed by his father.

When they arrived in Downing Street the board of naval strategy was already in session. The Earl of Bingham sent in his card and a few minutes later they were admitted.

The president of the board regarded the two Bingham with something like open hostility in his eyes.

"I presume you have come to offer some explanation regarding the nasty affair," he growled.

"You are correct, sir," Allan spoke up as he advanced.

Around the big table sat a number of naval officers, some of them who had been classmates of Allan Bingham at Oxford. Not a single one of them gave him the slightest nod of recognition.

"I am here to speak in my own defense," the former lieutenant went on in a clear, ringing voice. "Judging by the expressions on your faces, I stand already condemned. But I beg of you, reserve your final opinion until you have heard me."

A loud murmur of objection went around the table.

"Gentlemen," the president rapped for order. "Do you want to hear Mr. Bingham?"

"No—no," came back in chorus.

"But you must hear me," Allan shouted, going to

the head of the table and taking a position at the right of the president. "It is unjust to judge me without being heard. And I shall not leave this room until I have explained."

Again the president of the board rapped for order.

"You have my permission to speak, sir," he said, turning to young Bingham, "but I warn you that nothing you can say will change the verdict."

With these discouraging words ringing in his ears, the former naval officer began to speak in his own defense.

"You are condemning me because of the base and insinuating statement made by a French paper," he shouted. "It is the worst kind of slander. I was made the victim of trickery, fostered and carried through by Captain Le Mans of the French navy.

"In spite of repeated warnings that man was allowed to enter my home. During my absence he bribed one of the servants. During the night he entered my room, broke open my desk and stole a package of papers containing also the formula for the high explosive. I have no one to corroborate my statement but my old father here."

The Earl of Bingham flashed his son a grateful look. Although the statement was at variance with the truth, Allan had protected the women.

As Allan finished speaking, Lord Pearsall, an old retired admiral rose.

"Mr. Bingham's statements sound logical enough," he declared, clearing his throat several times. "But there are several things I would like to have explained."

Facing the accused he went on in a cold, raspy voice:

"You were a lieutenant on his Majesty's cruiser 'The Scorpion,' were you not?"

"Yes, sir," young Bingham replied.

"You married quite unexpectedly and resigned your commission?"

"I did."

"What was the reason, Mr. Bingham?"

The latter was in a quandary. He could not answer that question without quoting his wife.

"I refuse to answer," he said finally.

"After your resignation was accepted under protest, you came home and took up your residence at Bingham Manor," the interrogator went on.

"Yes, sir."

"And you immediately began to cultivate Captain Le Mans, an attache of the French navy in London."

Again Allan Bingham was at a loss for an answer. He could not reply truthfully without incriminating his mother. And he would rather have bitten off his tongue than put the slightest taint on her name.

"Captain Le Mans and I were regarded as friends," he lied.

"Then you left for an extended trip for Scotland and left Le Mans to roam about as he pleased at the manor," the ex-admiral went on in a tone of bitter accusation. "If it was not done for a specified purpose, it was criminal neglect.

"You deliberately exposed a secret of the English navy to a known enemy. Knowing you and your father as I do, I am unwilling to believe that you sold the formula, but you are guilty of gross carelessness that has justly earned for you the contempt of every loyal British soldier and sailor."

Having delivered this scathing arraignment, the speaker sat down amid muttered approval.

But Allan Bingham's fighting blood was up.

"You seem to forget that the formula for the high explosive was my personal property," he cried. "And as my personal property it was my privilege to do with it as I saw fit. If I was careless in guarding it, I'll take the blame.

"But," and his fist came down with a sudden crash on the table, "I'll kill any man who dares stand up and tell me that I sold the formula to La Mans or any other agent of the French government."

There was no response to this challenge.

The men seated about the table stared at one another.

"The affair is very unfortunate," the former lieutenant continued after a lengthy pause during which not a murmur was heard. "I realize fully what a powerful nation like France could do with such a high explosive. If sufficient powder was placed behind a projectile, it could be hurled across the English channel.

"It would be a frightful thing to use in case of submarine warfare. A torpedo could be sent on its way to destruction with such speed and correctness, and for such a great distance, that our heaviest dreadnaughts would prove ineffective.

"So you see, I am thoroughly aware of the danger. But we need not be entirely discouraged. While I have not a copy of the formula in my possession, I could easily make another, for I know every trick in chemistry. Are you willing to give me another chance?"

At the conclusion of these remarks the president of the naval board arose.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have heard Mr. Bingham's explanation and also what he offers us. What is your pleasure?"

"I move that both the explanation and the offer

be rejected," moved one.

"I second it," cried another promptly.

The president put the question. There was a spirited debate for almost thirty minutes.

When the matter was put to a rising vote finally, every one present, except the old ex-admiral, rose.

The Earl of Bingham sat alone in the rear of the room, weeping like a child. By that overwhelming vote his only son had been disgraced for life.

He made an attempt to rise in order to utter a protest, but, realizing the uselessness of it, he remained seated.

Allan Bingham took the verdict with a defiant look in his eyes. Slanting a sarcastic glance at the circle of men, who stood with their backs toward him, he joined his father.

"Don't worry, dad," he said hoarsely. "I'll bring Le Mans right into this room and make him vindicate me if it is the last thing I do on earth."

But it was only the hopeless rambling of a man utterly in disgrace.

Chapter 126

THE SEPARATION

HEN Philip Gordon caught his wife in Harold Wayne's arms and he made a dash for her, his twitching fingers seemed determined to get around her white throat. She saw the motion and she also saw the look of a murderer in his flashing eyes.

With a scream she threw her head back, thus evading him. Before he could make another attack, reason triumphed over hot anger, and he stood rigid.

Neither of the guilty couple uttered a sound. They seemed paralyzed with fear.

"I ought to kill you both!" Gordon said through his clenched teeth. "But you are not ready to die. The devil would claim you!"

Alice took a step toward Wayne, as if seeking his protection.

"You are making a mistake when you jump at the conclusion that we are guilty of having done a dishonorable thing, Mr. Gordon," the young man spoke up. "I assure you that your wife——"

"Not another word out of you!" Phil hissed. "You are both guilty as Hell!"

"But you are wrong," Wayne persisted manfully, "and you must let me explain. Your wife is absolutely innocent. I alone am to blame."

Phil measured the speaker with a contemptuous glance.

"The best thing you can do for yourself is to leave this place instantly," he said in an ominous quiet tone.

"I'll settle with you later. Right now my business is with —with this woman."

Alice, cringing with fright, clung to her lover.

"No—no, Harold!" she cried. "If you go, take me with you!"

"You are going to stay right here!" her husband commanded. "And after I am through with you, you can go where you pleas. I won't tolerate you any longer in my house."

Wayne made an attempt to speak again, but Gordon, beside himself with cold fury, seemed ready to strangle him.

"You better be going!" the latter said with the voice of a killer.

As the young man still hesitated, Gordon's clenched fist shot out with lightning speed. The blow only grazed Wayne's jaw because he parried it skillfully. And before another came, he quickly stepped out of harm's way and left the pavilion in haste.

Alice tried to run after him, but Phil caught her by the shoulder and hurled her back with almost brutal force.

Anger and defiance flashed in Alice's eyes as she kept from crashing to the floor by a quick movement. Once more she attempted to flee, but again she was hurled back.

For a moment they faced each other in open hatred. But Phil Gordon's voice held infinite pain as he spoke.

"I—I hardly know what to say to you," he began, "except that you are the most miserable wretch God ever let live. So far as I am concerned, this thing could be settled easy enough.

"But there is your old, gray-haired father — as fine and noble a gentleman as ever drew breath. He is

as honorable as you are dishonorable. He is as morally clean as you are morally unclean.

"What comfort did you ever bring him? None! Nothing but heartaches. And now you have sunk to the level of an ordinary adventuress. You became guilty of carrying on a low love affair with another man. It will kill your father if he hears of this, and——"

"Why don't you go and tell him?" Alice snapped viciously. "I think you are quite capable of it."

Phil shook his head sadly.

"No, nothing is further from my mind right now." he said. "I could not love him more if he were my own parent. God forbid that I should add to his already great unhappiness. But you — you!" his voice rose. "For God's sake, if you have an excuse for your abominable conduct, let me hear it."

She met his pleading eyes, her own filled with scorn and defiance.

"My one excuse is that you yourself are responsible for what happened," she flared back. "What has my life been since I married you? You made me your wife because you thought I'd take care of your children and coddle them. You never loved me from the very beginning.

"What did you expect me to do when you neglected me? I am not the kind of a meek wife who will suffer without striking back. And then you took that Desmond woman under your wing.

"She got all the attention I should have had. Since she came to Oak Manor, you became a changed man. Oh, yes, you need not shake your head. What I am telling you is true. And I'll go a step farther.

"This pretty governess of your children means more to you than I ever did. And who and what is she? Where did she come from, and where does she get a

license to carry that head of hers so high?"

Philip Gordon dropped his eyes, for the blow had struck true. With his face flushed he stood speechless for almost a full minute.

"I have always had my own ideas about your Miss Desmond," Alice went on with a sneer. "Although you always seemed to think that she is everything that is pure and clean, in my opinion she is nothing but a shrewd adventuress. Why she——"

A quick gesture from her husband stopped her flow of words.

"Let me tell you something," he remarked in a quiet tone, "Miss Desmond stands so high above you that it is impossible for you to insult her And I'll tell you something else.

"This same woman of whom you speak with such contempt, saved you on a previous occasion when you met your lover right here in this pavilion. She assumed the blame voluntarily for something you did and were guilty of."

Alice uttered a nasty laugh.

"Oh, did she?" Another laugh followed. "How wonderful and self-sacrificing. But I happen to know why your dear Miss Desmond interfered. She loved you so well that she could not bear seeing you unhappy as a result of my former meeting with Harold Wayne."

Gordon bristled at this. His right hand was raised, but with a mighty effort he restrained the brutal instinct.

"Only a woman of your low type could make such an accusation," he retorted in cold anger. You have no shame left in you. In spite of Miss Desmond's wonderful self-sacrifice, you went right back and committed the same dishonorable act."

Continued in next number

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